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The Navigator

Waukesha County Veterans' Services

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FEDERAL, STATE & LOCAL BENEFITS UPDATE

NEWS UPDATE FOR FEDERAL BENEFITS



Disabled Veterans Get Health Care Priority from VA

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

WASHINGTON --- All veterans with service-connected medical problems will receive priority access to health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) under a new directive.

"Caring for veterans with service-connected medical problems is a major reason VA exists," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. "This directive should ease the minds of veterans who no longer have to wait for health care appointments."

The new directive provides that all veterans requiring care for a service-connected disability -- regardless of the extent of their injury -- must be scheduled for a primary care evaluation within 30 days of their request for care. If a VA facility is unable to schedule an appointment within 30 days, it must arrange for care at another VA facility, at a contract facility or through a sharing agreement.

The directive covers hospitalization and outpatient care. It does not apply to care for medical problems not related to a service-connected disability. However, veterans needing emergency care will be treated immediately.

The new provision is an extension of rules that took effect in October 2002 for severely disabled veterans. Under the earlier rule, priority access to health care went to veterans with disabilities rated at 50 percent or more. For the severely disabled, the priority includes care for non-service-connected medical problems.

The number of veterans using VA's health care system has risen dramatically in recent years, increasing from 2.9 million in 1995 to nearly 5 million in 2003. Although VA operates more than 1,300 sites of care, including 162 hospitals and more than 800 outpatient clinics, the increase in veterans seeking care outstrips VA's capacity to treat them.

"VA provides the finest health care in the country, but if a veteran cannot see a doctor in a timely manner, then we have failed that veteran," Principi said.

"I will work to honor our commitment to veterans," he said. "But when it comes to non-emergency health care, we must give the priority to veterans with service-connected disabilities."

COMMENTARY CORNER By: John L. Margowski, Director

This newsletter contains some very important information on federal legislation recently signed into law that improves benefits for veterans and also offers updated protections for those service personnel being activated and sent overseas.

Many times, when I am at various functions, I have heard veterans talking about the fact that Congress and the State legislature seem to do little to help veterans. The two federal bills cited in the enclosed articles are examples of changes made that will help many veterans, service personnel and their families. Yes there is more that both legislative bodies could and should be doing to help veterans. It is your job and the job of the various veterans' organizations to continue to call and write congressmen and state legislators with issues in the area of veterans' benefits that need to be changed and enhanced. You are the constituents of these legislators and it is you who can effect change. You should also

contact them and say thanks when they have voted on a bill that helps veterans. Don't just ask for improvements, say thanks for them when laws are enacted or changed.

By the time this newsletter is out, the annual Salute to Wisconsin Legislators will have taken place. I hope you were able to attend. Given the very tight budget years ahead for the Wisconsin legislature, we need to keep our requests for changes and improvements in benefits fiscally responsible. We also need to ensure that those benefits already in place continue to be fiscally good programs that meet veterans' needs.

This is also an election year. If you are dissatisfied with current individuals holding public office, show up at any local political debates and candidate public appearances that might be occurring in your local area and ask questions of the candidates. Most importantly, go to the primary polls and vote for the candidate of your choice. If there is no primary in your area, then go to the polls during the general election and vote. You can and do make a difference.

For those of you who read this newsletter and belong to a local post, I hope your post is active in school presentations and ac-

tivities. I know many posts are. I take local veterans and go to schools throughout the county with a power point presentation. I give a pictorial presentation on the history of the U.S. Flag as well as Do's and Don'ts with regard to displaying the flag and its disposal. Sometimes a post will send along a team to present a flag disposal ceremony in the schoolyard. I also take groups of veterans from various war periods, peacetime and guard and reservists to give presentations on military experiences, patriotism, what they are now doing in civilian life and how their military experience helped them in their civilian career.

The above examples are ways that your Post or you as an individual can contribute to your community. Schools do not teach much about our wars, or about the importance of serving in the military. It is vital that veterans get into the schools to tell real experiences and teach the youth of today about the importance of military service and what it means to be a patriot. Veterans should also be participating in the oral history programs at their local library, museum, or the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Museum. Record your service story for future generations to hear.



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If you have any questions or comments about the contents of the newsletter, please contact Waukesha County Veterans' Service Office at 262-548-7732.

Veterans Receive Cost-of-Living Increase in Benefits

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.gov/news>

WASHINGTON (Dec. 22, 2003) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is including a 2.1 percent increase in the disability benefit payments that millions of veterans and dependents will receive at the end of December.

President Bush authorized an increase matching the increase in Social Security rates by signing into law the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003.

"These benefits are a reflection of countless sacrifices ranging from peacetime injuries to wartime service," Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi said. "Cost-of-living increases for veterans and their survivors ensure strong programs that keep pace with their needs."

The new rates apply to benefits earned in December. VA benefit payments routinely are made at the beginning of the month following the one in which they are earned,

but with the New Year's Day holiday, checks or direct deposits will generally be received on Dec. 31.

Those receiving the increase include 2.5 million veterans awarded compensation for disabilities sustained or made worse during their military service, as well as 347,000 wartime veterans who are totally disabled from civilian-life causes and who receive a pension under an income-based program.

The increase also will go to 337,000 spouses, children and parents of veterans who died in service or from a service-connected condition, and another 231,000 who are served by an income-based program for survivors of wartime veterans.

Most veterans and survivors will receive their increased VA compensation or pension through direct deposit, which VA encourages because of its speed and security.

IOM Creates Web Site for Veterans

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.gov/news>

WASHINGTON (Dec. 17, 2003) - The Institute of Medicine (IOM) has created a new Internet Web site with information about a variety of military-related health issues.

"IOM's new Website is one more tool available to veterans, health care practitioners and others interested in the well-being of our veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi.

The Web site, at <http://veterans.iom.edu>, has separate sections for health care issues affecting the last four major military conflicts - World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Gulf War. At each section, visitors can read electronic versions of IOM-produced reports or purchase publications.

Other sections list IOM's completed reports and reports in progress,

while another area contains studies about chemical and biological agents suspected of causing health problems for military members. There is also a section with reports and information about deployment health.

Part of the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine is a nonprofit organization that provides advice on matters of biomedical science.

Commission Report on VA's Realignment Delayed

The following information was found on the internet <http://www.va.gov/news>

WASHINGTON (Dec. 22, 2003) - The chairman of the independent commission studying the draft plan for restructuring the health care services of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) says the panel needs more time.

"We're committed to doing the most thorough job possible. We owe it to our veterans and to the Department of Veterans Affairs to properly examine the 208,000 letters, faxes and e-mails we have received from the public, along with the testimony of more than 770 witnesses who spoke during our 38 field hearings," said Everett Alvarez Jr., the commission's chairman.

Alvarez said the commission's recommendations, originally due to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi in mid December, will now be delivered in four to six weeks. Secretary Principi will then review the commission's findings and make a final decision.

VA's draft realignment plan known as CARES, short for "Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services," is the most comprehensive examination of the department's health care system in decades. The goal is to ensure that VA, which operates 162 hospitals and more than 800 clinics, provides services to veterans where those services are most needed.

FACT SHEET— Filipino Veterans' Eligibility for VA Health Care Benefits

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

On December 6, 2003, President Bush signed into law the "Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003," which enhances the eligibility of certain World War II Filipino veterans for VA health care benefits. These veterans are now eligible for enrollment in the VA health care on the same basis as U.S. veterans

Q—Who Qualifies for this Benefit?

VA health care benefits are now available for Filipino Commonwealth Army Veterans, New Filipino Scouts, and Veterans recognized as belonging to organized Filipino Guerilla Forces who reside in the United States and who are citizens or lawfully admitted for permanent residence. Old Filipino Scouts are also eligible for VA health care benefits; however, they do not have to meet the citizenship and residency requirements.

Q—Is Proof of Citizenship or Residency Needed?

Service-connected Filipino veterans

receiving VA disability compensation at the full-dollar rate do not have to furnish proof to qualify for the benefit. Other Filipino veterans must provide one of the following pieces of evidence to be eligible for this benefit:

- A valid U.S. passport
- A birth certificate showing he or she was born in the U.S.
- A Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the U.S. issued by a U.S. Consulate abroad
- Verification by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to VA that the Filipino veteran is a naturalized citizen of the U.S.

Verification by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to VA that a veteran is an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the U.S.

Q—What if I do not Qualify for Enrollment?

VA is not authorized to provide

health care benefits to Filipino veterans who do not qualify for enrollment in the VA health care system based upon the requirements noted above.

Q—Am I Able to Receive Care at the VA Outpatient Clinic in the Philippines?

Service-connected Filipino veterans who meet the U.S. citizen/residency requirements are eligible for treatment for any condition at the VA clinic in the Philippines

Q—What if I Have Questions?

To learn more about VA enrollment benefits, potential copayment requirement and how to apply for VA health care benefits log on to the VA's Enrollment Home Page at <http://www1.va.gov/elig>; Call VA's Health Benefits Service Center toll-free at 1-877-222-8387; or contact the Enrollment Coordinator at your local VA health care facility.

Filipino Veterans Gain New Benefits

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

WASHINGTON (Dec. 30, 2003) - The Department of Veterans Affairs is offering new VA services for certain World War II Filipino veterans under two bills signed into law by President Bush.

"We are pleased that Congress moved favorably on our legislative proposal to help meet the medical and financial benefit needs of deserving Filipino veterans residing in the United States -- veterans who fought beside our troops in World War II as members of the Commonwealth Army and New Philippine Scouts," Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi said.

VA estimates that as many as 9,000 Filipino veterans living in the United States who are citizens or lawfully admitted for permanent residence may be eligible for some of the expanded benefits.

Previously, both Commonwealth Army veterans and New Philippine Scouts were eligible for treatment of service-connected disabilities in VA medical facilities. The Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003 removes the requirement that these veterans must qualify for VA service-connected compensation as a condition of health care.

In addition to removing the compensation requirement, the law treats both groups equally, expanding eligibility for certain health care benefits to New Philippine Scouts. Under earlier regulations, Commonwealth Army veterans but not New Philippine Scouts were eligible for treatment of non-service-connected disabilities

(Continued on page 5 - Filipino Veterans)

Longitudinal Health Survey of Gulf War Era Veterans

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

Background—VHA, Environmental Epidemiology Service, has sent a letter and 20-page health survey/questionnaire to 15,000 in-country veterans of the first Gulf War and 15,000 Gulf War Era veterans. The package was released in small batches beginning October 31, 2003. The following press release discusses the purpose of the survey.

WASHINGTON (Dec. 15, 2003) -- Veterans of the first Gulf War recently received a letter from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) asking them to take part in a survey about their health.

"We are committed to finding answers for veterans who still suffer from a variety of symptoms and illnesses resulting from their service in the first Gulf War," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. "With soldiers returning every

day from operations there, pursuing these answers remains a top priority."

The survey, called the Longitudinal Health Study of Gulf War Era Veterans, is a follow-up to one conducted in 1995-1996 on the health of 30,000 veterans of the 1990-1991 Gulf War.

A letter signed by Principi was sent to veterans explaining the study's purpose and procedures for enrolling and encouraging their participation, whether or not they took part in the original survey or served in the Gulf War theater.

Participation is voluntary. Veterans fill out a detailed survey with questions about general health, functional status, chronic medical conditions, unexplained multi-symptom illnesses, doctor and hospital visits and treatments. All

information is confidential.

Inquiries from Veterans—

Veterans calling concerning the survey should be provided the basic background information outlined above.

The selection of veterans to be surveyed was done so that each veteran represented a gender, branch of service, and unit component of the total population of Gulf War veterans. Veterans who did not receive a letter and survey packet who ask to participate in the study should be advised that due to the scientific nature of the sampling procedure for selecting participants VHA cannot accept volunteers for the study.

Veterans can take part in the Gulf War Registry Examination Program. Veterans should contact the local VAMC to initiate participation in this program.

(Filipino Veterans -- Continued from page 4)

in the same manner as U.S. World War II veterans if they receive certain VA compensation and reside legally in the United States.

The health benefit changes are effective immediately. Affected Filipino veterans not currently using VA health care may apply for enrollment in the VA medical plan immediately by completing Form 10-10EZ online at www.va.gov/1010ez.htm or by requesting a mailed form by calling VA at 1-877-222-8387.

Filipino veterans seeking care must include proof of legal residency with their applications when submitted to the VA treating facility of their choice. Examples of acceptable proof are available online at www.va.gov/elig or from 1-877-222-8387.

The Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 will provide some Filipino World War II veterans additional financial benefits that were requested by the administration. It will double the VA disability compensation currently

paid to New Philippine Scouts if they live in the United States and are either a citizen or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence. Previously these veterans were paid at half the disability rates normally paid to U.S. veterans.

That law will improve benefits for the eligible survivors of both New Philippine Scouts and veterans of the Commonwealth Army or organized guerrilla units if the survivors are currently paid at the half rate and meet the U.S. citizenship or lawful permanent alien criteria.

Those changes are effective immediately, but no action is required by the affected Filipino veterans or dependents who are currently on the rolls at the lower rates. VA will automatically adjust their payments.

New Philippine Scouts who lawfully reside in the United States are now eligible for burial in a national cemetery and are eligible for the monetary and headstone or marker burial benefits available to U.S. veterans if they meet the residency requirements.

VA Health Care Enrollment Priority Groups

The following information was received from the Department of Veterans Affairs

Enrollment Priority 1

- Veterans with service connected disabilities rated 50% or more disabling.

Enrollment Priority 2

- Veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 30% or 40% disabling.

Enrollment Priority 3

- Veterans who are former POWs
- Veterans awarded the Purple Heart
- Veterans whose discharge was for a disability that was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty.
- Veterans with service connected disabilities rated 10% or 20% disabling
- Veterans awarded special eligibility classification under Title 38, U.S.C. Section 1151, "benefits for individuals disabled by treatment or vocational rehabilitation".

Enrollment Priority 4

- Veterans who are receiving aid and attendance or housebound benefits
- Veterans who have been determined by VA to be catastrophically disabled

Enrollment Priority 5

- Non-service connected veterans and non-compensable service connected veterans rated 0% disabled whose annual income and net worth are below the established VA Means Test thresholds
- Veterans receiving VA pension benefits
- Veterans eligible for Medicaid benefits.

Enrollment Priority 6

- World War I veterans
- Mexican Border War veterans
- Veterans solely seeking care for disorders associated with:
 - exposure to herbicides while serving in Vietnam or
 - exposure to ionizing radiation during atmospheric testing or during the occupation of Hi-

roshima and Nagasaki; or

- for disorders associated with service in the Gulf War;
- for any illness associated with service in combat in a war after the Gulf War or during a period of hostility after November 11, 1998; or
- Compensable 0% service connected veterans

Enrollment Priority 7

Veterans with income and/or net worth *above* the VA Means Test threshold and income *below* the HUD geographic index who agree to pay specified copayments.

- Subpriority a: Non-compensable 0% service connected veterans who were enrolled in the VA Health Care System on a specified date and who have remained enrolled since that date
- Subpriority c: Non-service connected veterans who were enrolled in the VA Health Care System on a specified date and who have remained enrolled since that date.
- Subpriority e: Non-compensable 0% service connected veterans not included in Subpriority a above
- Subpriority g: Non-service connected veterans not included in Subpriority c above

Enrollment Priority 8

Veterans with income and/or net worth above the VA Means Test threshold and the HUD geographic index who agree to pay specified copayments

- Subpriority a: Non-compensable 0% service connected veterans enrolled as of January 16, 2003 and who have remained enrolled since that date.
- Subpriority c: Non-service connected veterans enrolled as of January 16, 2003 and who have remained enrolled since that date
- Subpriority e: Non-compensable 0% service connected veterans applying for enrollment after January 16, 2003.
- Subpriority g: Non-service connected veterans applying for enrollment after January 16, 2003.

Additional Information:

The term service-connected means, with respect to a condition or disability, that VA has determined that the condition or disability was incurred in or aggravated by military service. Some veterans may have to agree to pay copayments to be placed in certain priority groups.

SEE NEXT PAGE FOR PRIORITY GROUPS

**NONCOMPENSABLE 0% SERVICE CONNECTED AND NON-SERVICE CONNECTED VETERANS
BENEFICIARY TRAVEL AND PHARMACY CO-PAYMENTS**

VETERAN WITH NUMBER OF DEPENDENTS	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Priority Group 5	\$25,162	\$30,197	\$31,885	\$33,573	\$35,261	\$36,949	*
Priority Group 7*** & 8	\$25,163 +	\$30,198 +	\$31,886 +	\$33,574 +	\$35,262 +	\$36,590 +	*
Pharmacy Co-Pay	\$9,894	\$12,959	\$14,647	\$16,335	\$18,023	\$19,711	**
Beneficiary Travel	\$9,894	\$12,959	\$14,647	\$16,335	\$18,023	\$19,711	**

ADD \$1,688 FOR EACH ADDITIONAL DEPENDENT

* EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2004

** EFFECTIVE DATE: December 1, 2003

***** GEOGRAPHIC MEANS TEST LEVEL**

Veterans whose annual family income is between the Priority Group 8 income threshold and the HUD Index for their primary residence are reclassified as Priority Group 7 and are authorized an 80% reduction in **inpatient** copayments.

STATE OF WISCONSIN - HUD LOW INCOME LIMITS FOR WAUKESHA COUNTY

1 PERSON	2 PERSON	3 PERSON	4 PERSON	5 PERSON	6 PERSON	7 PERSON	8 PERSON
37,650	43,000	48,400	53,750	58,050	62,350	66,650	70,950

Required Co-Payments for Non-Service Connected Care

OUTPATIENT VISITS:

	Specialty Care	Primary Care	Preventive Health
Priority Group 5	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Priority Group 7	\$50.00	\$15.00	\$0.00
Priority Group 8	\$50.00	\$15.00	\$0.00

INPATIENT CARE:

Priority Group 5	No Charge
Priority Group 7	\$175.20 per first 90 days of inpatient care effective 1/1/2004 87.60 per each additional 90 days of inpatient care Plus \$2.00 per day per diem for hospital care
Priority Group 8	\$876 per first 90 days of inpatient care effective 01/01/2004 \$438 per each additional 90 days of inpatient care effective 01/01/2004 Plus \$10.00 per day per diem for hospital care

LONG TERM CARE

Veterans receiving Long Term Care benefits for non-service connected conditions whose annual income exceeds the basic pension level are required to make a copayment for that care. There is no charge for the first 21 days of long term care. Maximum copayment of \$94.00 per day of Nursing Home Care starting on the 22nd day.

PHARMACY CO-PAYMENT

Veterans receiving medications on an outpatient basis from VA facilities for the treatment of a non-service connected disability or condition, are required to make a co-payment of \$7.00 for each 30-day or less supply of medication provided. Veterans enrolled in Priority Groups 2 through 6 will have an annual cap of \$840. Veterans receiving medications for treatment of a service-connected condition, veterans rated 50 percent or more service-connected, and veterans receiving VA pension or whose income is at or below the maximum VA pension rate are exempt from the co-payment requirement for medication.

Revised 01/05/2004

President Bush Signs Smith Veterans Benefits Expansion Legislation

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

Washington—New Law Will Increase Support for Disabled Veterans, Surviving Spouses, and their Children

As enacted, H.R. 2297, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003:

Allows VA to provide specially adapted housing grant to severely disabled service-members prior to their separation from active duty service.

Increases the specially adapted automobile grant from \$9,000 to \$11,000, and increases the specially adapted housing grants from \$48,000 to \$50,000 for the most severely disabled veterans and from \$9,250 to \$10,000 for less severely disabled veterans.

Restores dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), home loan, education, and burial benefit eligibility for spouses remarried after age 57.

Increases monthly educational benefits for

spouses and dependent children of disabled veterans from \$695 to \$788 for full-time study, from \$522 to \$592 for three-quarter time study, and from \$347 to \$394 for half-time study.

Expands benefits eligibility to children with spina bifida who were born to certain Vietnam-era veterans who served in Korea near the demilitarized zone.

Allows the surviving spouse or dependent children to receive the full amount of accrued benefits if the veteran dies while their claim is still pending.

Eliminates the 30-day requirement for POWs to qualify for presumptions of service-connection for certain disabilities: psychosis, any of the anxiety states, dysthymic disorder, organic residuals of frostbite, and post-traumatic osteoarthritis.

Provides full compensation and DIC to members of the new Philippine Scouts if the

individual resides in the United States as a citizen or permanent resident. Also extends eligibility for burial in a national cemetery.

Expands the Montgomery GI Bill program to cover self-employment training programs of less than six months and entrepreneurship courses at approved institutions.

Allows federal agencies to create "sole-source" contracts for disabled veteran-owned small businesses - up to \$5 million for manufacturing contract awards and up to \$3 million for non-manufacturing contract awards.

Allows federal agencies to restrict certain contracts to disabled veteran-owned small businesses if at least two such concerns are qualified to bid on the contract.

Mandates that the Department of Labor place staff in veterans' assistance offices at overseas military installations 90 days after date of enactment.

Service Members' Civil Relief Act Signed into Law

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

WASHINGTON, January 7, 2004 -- A new law replacing the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940 provides servicemembers greater protections to handle personal financial and legal obligations, officials said.

President Bush signed the Service Members' Civil Relief Act into law Dec. 19.

"The focus of the (new act) is the same as under the SSCRA: To provide protections to servicemembers who have difficulty meeting their personal financial and legal obligations because of their military service," said Lt. Col. Patrick Lindemann, deputy director for legal policy in the office of the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

This is significant, because it clarifies and updates SSCRA provisions and adds some protections.

"Servicemembers on long-term deployments, or called to active duty, should not have to worry about their families in their absence being evicted from their quarters without sufficient legal protections, or that they are paying on a leased car or apartment that they can't use, or about civil legal proceedings they can't attend because of their deployment," he said.

"These are some of the situations the SCRA covers so that servicemembers are able to devote their energies to the military mission and the defense needs of the nation, and not on civil matters waiting for them at home," he said.

An automatic 90-day stay of civil proceedings upon application by the servicemember is what Colonel Lindemann called "a significant change" in the new act. This applies to all judicial and administrative hearings. Previously, stays were discretionary with the courts.

The new relief act also makes it clear the 6-percent limitation on interest rates for pre-service debts requires a reduction in monthly payments, and any interest in excess of 6 percent is forgiven, not deferred, Colonel Lindemann said.

The SCRA also expanded the protection against eviction. Under the SSCRA, servicemembers and their family who entered into a lease for \$1,200 or less could not be evicted without a court order. This amount is increased to \$2,400 and added an annual inflation adjustment. For 2004, the maximum will be \$2,465, significantly increasing the number of servicemembers entitled to this protection, Colonel Lindemann said.

The new relief act also gives the servicemember who has received permanent change-of-station orders or who is being deployed for 90 days or more the right to terminate a housing lease with 30 days' written notice. Before, servicemembers could be required to pay for housing they were unable to occupy.

One of the more significant new provisions is an added protection for motor-vehicle leases. Any active-duty servicemember who has received PCS orders outside the continental United States, or who is being deployed for 180 days or more, may terminate a motor-vehicle lease. The law prohibits early termination charges.

"Now, servicemembers won't have to pay monthly lease payments for a car they can't use," Colonel Lindemann said.

"Servicemembers may not always realize all the protections they have under the law," Colonel Lindemann said. "If servicemembers have questions about the SCRA or the protections that they may be entitled to, they should contact their unit judge advocate or installation legal assistance officer for further assistance."

VA Gets Record Budget for FY 2004

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will receive a record budget of \$64 billion for the current fiscal year, up \$4.2 billion from the previous spending level.

"I'm grateful for President Bush's leadership in ensuring that VA can honor our nation's commitment to its veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. "I'm also appreciative of the support that Congress has shown when it comes to taking care of veterans."

The budget for fiscal year 2004, which began Oct. 1, 2003, comes as VA is putting the finishing touches on the administration's proposed budget for fiscal year 2005, which will be formally unveiled Feb. 2.

Among the major items in fiscal year 2004 budget are \$28.4 billion (including \$1.7 billion in collections) for health care, up \$2.9 billion from the previous year, and \$32.8 billion in benefits programs.

Other budgetary categories include:

- \$143.4 million for the National Cemetery Administration, an \$11 million hike over

last year, plus nearly \$32 million in grants for state cemeteries;

- Full funding to expedite the handling of veterans' claims for disability compensation and pensions – a total of \$1 billion for all programs;
- Nearly \$176 million for health care and other programs to assist homeless veterans, an increase of over \$22 million from fiscal year 2003;
- \$101 million to support state extended-care facilities, \$3 million more than last year; and
- \$522 million for construction, plus the authority to transfer another \$400 million to health care construction.

"This budget will ensure VA is able to meet the needs of the latest generation of combat vets who are now returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, while continuing to care for those from earlier conflicts," Principi said.

VA Launches "Kids Page" on Internet

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

WASHINGTON (Nov. 4, 2003) - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced the launch of VA Kids, a new Web page designed to help young people understand what it means to be a veteran.

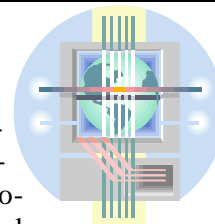
"The ideals of military service and patriotism can be unfamiliar to some children and young adults," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. "The VA Kids Web page supports President Bush's initiatives on education and volunteerism by providing an entertaining and informative way for young people to learn why veterans are special."

The Web page, at <http://www.va.gov/kids>, contains areas for students in kindergarten through grade 5, for grades 6 through 12 and for teachers. VA Kids also has information about VA, Veterans Day, scholarships, student volunteer opportunities, rehabilitative and special events for disabled veterans and links to veteran-related sites.

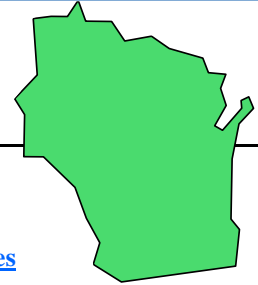
For younger students, VA Kids has interactive activities such as puzzles, coloring pages, matching contests and age-appropriate language to describe a number of patriotic topics. For older students, there

is information on volunteer programs, scholarships and more sophisticated educational resources, games and reference links. The teachers' section contains additional information, links and suggested classroom activities.

"The title 'veteran' is bestowed by a grateful nation on citizens willing to sacrifice everything to preserve our freedom," said Principi. "It is our responsibility to honor these heroes by ensuring that each American generation understands what this prestigious title means."



NEWS UPDATE FOR STATE BENEFITS



New Law to Expand Veterans Services In Northwestern Wisconsin

The following information was found on the internet at: www.wisgov.state.wi.us/pressreleases

(MADISON) -- A new bill signed into law today authorizes the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) to begin the initial steps that may result in the development of residential, treatment, and nursing care facilities for veterans at a Northern Wisconsin Veterans Center campus in Chippewa Falls, on the site of the Northern Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled (NWC). The bipartisan bill, Senate Bill 205, was signed into law today by Governor Jim Doyle at a ceremony at the FCS Financial Services in Wausau. The NWC facility is currently being downsized.

"Veterans in northwestern Wisconsin ought to be able to obtain long-term health care and needed services in the region of the state in which they live," Governor Doyle said. "Not only does signing this bill into law provide improved access for veterans to receive the services they need, but it will create many jobs in the Chippewa Falls area."

The bill, authored by State Senator Dave Zien (R-Chippewa Falls), was passed by both the Assembly and Senate earlier this fall. "In a time when the legislature has come under criticism for being divided, this legislation represents an extraordinary effort of Republicans and Democrats alike coming together in unanimous support of our state's veterans," said Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary John A. Scocos. "I am proud to say today that the Governor and every single member of the state Legislature acted in unison to make this effort possible," said Scocos.

The new law authorizes the first step in what is hoped will result in the creation of a Northern Wisconsin Veterans Center campus at Chippewa Falls. Modeled after the Southern Wisconsin Center at Union Grove, the new center may eventually include a VA Outpatient Clinic, homeless transitional program, assisted living facility, skilled nursing facility, and might also include adult day health care. The facility could also provide as many as 165 jobs, according to state government estimates. A large

number of Chippewa Falls area skilled workers are being displaced as a result of downsizing of developmentally disabled services at the Northern Wisconsin Center.

In September, Scocos provided testimony on behalf of the WDVA before the federal VA Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission in support of such a new center on the Chippewa Falls NWC campus. In his testimony at the hearing, Scocos said, "The potential exists for continued expansion of the federal/state partnership programs."

"We believe that significant savings could be realized through a collaborative initiative, one that could provide nursing home care services, assisted living, transitional housing for homeless veterans, primary care and adult day health care," said Scocos.

"The long-term care needs for veterans in the northwest corner of our state are not being adequately met," Scocos said. "Expansion of the state home program to northwest Wisconsin could represent a win-win situation for both partners," he said. "We recommend this course of action be considered," testified Scocos.

WDVA will seek initial federal funding in early 2004 for a homeless transitional assistance program that would be located on the Chippewa Falls campus. According to department officials, long-term care projects will take additional time and effort.

The signing into law of SB 205 represents the second major state bill passed within the last three weeks that expands benefits and services to veterans. On November 21, Governor Doyle signed into law Senate Bill 170 (now Wisconsin Act 83), a bipartisan veterans omnibus bill that includes an expansion of state veterans educational benefits and an expansion of state veterans benefits eligibility to recently returning troops serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Housing Available for Southeastern Wisconsin Veterans

The following information was found on the internet at: www.wisgov.state.wi.us/pressreleases

MADISON—Long-term care for Southeastern Wisconsin's aging veterans will be enhanced this year with the construction of a new 120-bed skilled nursing facility – and the naming of a new top administrator of the state's veterans home in Union Grove.

Glen Brower, a retired U.S. Army Lt. Colonel with over twenty years of active duty, has been named commandant of the facility to oversee the new construction – and to help ensure that all Southeastern Wisconsin veterans who are eligible have the chance to enroll at the facilities which, when completed will include both assisted living apartments for veterans and their spouses and skilled nursing care.

"We have a rapidly aging community of veterans in Wisconsin and more than half of them live in this part of the state," Brower said. "I am committed to making sure that every one of the more than 100,000 aging veterans in this area knows about this place and to help them come here if they feel it meets their needs."

Brower will oversee the current facilities at Union Grove where there are assisted living apartments still vacant for aging

veterans and their spouses. Construction of a new skilled nursing facility for more needy aging veterans will begin this year. More than a third of the state's half a million veterans are now over 65 years old and some need the close care that a skilled nursing facility can provide.

"When complete, the Union Grove facilities will rival the state's other veterans care center near Waupaca, which has won national honors for its top-quality care," Brower said.

"The tradition that has been established at Wisconsin Veterans Home at King by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs is one that we're going to see carried on in Union Grove," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs John Scocos. "That's why the appointment of Glen Brower as the Union Grove commandant is so important. With his military and private sector business experience, he will be the leader who will ensure that this state does its very best to serve veterans in Southeastern Wisconsin."

Wisconsin veterans are eligible to become members of the veterans homes if they have served on active duty for two

or more years or the full period of their initial service obligation. They are also eligible if they served on active duty for at least 90 days, one day of which must have been within a war-time period. Spouses of eligible veterans may also become members. The applicant must be a Wisconsin resident on the date of admission to the home and either a resident on the date of entry into active duty or for any consecutive 12-month period thereafter.

Brower welcomes the opportunity to meet with area businesses and community groups. If you'd like to schedule a meeting or tour the facility, please call 262-878-6749.

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove will serve as a venue for one of the WDVA's upcoming *Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits*, which are a key component of the department's "I Owe You" outreach campaign to educate and inform veterans and their families about benefits and services. The next area *Supermarket* will be held on May 15 at the Wisconsin Veterans Home-Union Grove.

FREE BRUNO SCOOTER—LIFT II FREE

Fits 96—2000 Chrysler Mini Van 200 lb weight limit

The Scooter-Lift II can raise and store a fully assembled scooter or wheelchair through the driver's or passenger's side sliding door of minivans, and passenger side doors of full size vans. It may require replacing the top rail.

**If you are interested in this FREE Scooter Lift contact:
Wally at 262-968-3260.**

(Please leave your phone number and name on the answering machine).

Donated by HUB South Chrysler / Plymouth

*Fairchild Hall*

Wisconsin Veterans Home at Union Grove, WI

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

Overview—We are in the process of establishing a range of services to meet the full continuum of long-term care needs for elderly and disabled veterans (assisted living, skilled nursing, day health care programs).

*Gates Hall*

Services—Efficiency apartments are currently available for veterans or couples seeking assisted living, many private as well as some double rooms, all with private showers.

- A safe environment with 24-hour support, and the camaraderie of fellow veterans.
- Primary care available through the USDVA Community Based Outpatient Clinic on campus.
- Pharmaceuticals available from the VA, frequently at no additional cost to the veteran.
- 24-hour nursing services.
- All meals, recreational and social services included.
- Lots of community volunteers.

Financing—Overall rates for assisted living care are competitive with the private sector.

- Federal veterans entitlements help make this affordable for many veterans (regardless of current income).
- Most veterans will find economic as well as quality reasons to consider application.

*Common Area*

Application—See your County Veterans Service Officer, or contact Steve Stead at Wisconsin Veterans Home Union Grove; 21425 C Spring Street; Union Grove, WI 53182; telephone number (262) 878-5668.

The County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) Association of Wisconsin is Accepting Nominations for its Veterans Advocacy Award

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/

Nominees for the award need not be a veteran. However, they must provide or have provided outstanding service to veterans and their families and have demonstrated a high degree of compassion for their constituents.

Nominations are limited to three pages, including a narrative of not more than two double spaced pages, and an identification page. The identification page will include the nominee's name, address, telephone number and occupation, as well as the name, address and telephone number of the individual submitting the nomination. Anyone may submit a nomination.

In 2003, the award was presented to Mrs. Ingrid Wenninger of Sheboygan for her efforts in organizing the Korean War 50 years commemoration in the City of Sheboygan on July 27, 2003. Brig. Gen. Kerry Denson of the Wisconsin

National Guard presented Korean War commemorative medals to 39 Korean War veterans from the City of Sheboygan.

The deadline for submitting nominations is June 1, 2004, and nominations should be sent to:

Christine Jordan
CVSO Association of Wisconsin
PO Box 1001
Elkhorn, WI 53121

For more information about the Veterans Advocacy Award, contact: the Waukesha County Veterans' Service Office, located in the Human Service Center, 500 River-view Avenue, Room G138, Waukesha, WI 53188-3680, or call 262-548-7732. Also, see our web site at www.waukeshacounty.gov/veterans.

Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, WI

The following information was found at www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/



King Veterans Home Grounds

The Wisconsin Veterans Home at King (Waupaca County) is the state's largest nursing care facility, but it still retains the friendliness and convenience of a small, close-knit community.

The picturesque campus, located on Rainbow Lake near Waupaca, includes four licensed nursing care buildings, cottages for married couples able to care for themselves, chapels, bowling alley, post office, theater, museum and library.

Veterans who meet criteria for military service and state residency may be admitted if they apply income and resources to the cost of their care as required by Medicaid. Members receive complete medical and nursing care as well as social services and recreational activities.

Many members participate in work therapy programs, which allow them to earn extra money while providing valuable services to their fellow members.

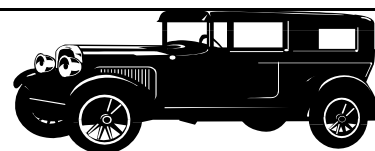
In addition, more than 375 volunteers contribute nearly 70,000 total hours of service annually through visits to members and support activities that enrich community life.

For more information about admission to the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, contact your County Veterans Service Office.

Application—See your County Veterans Service Officer.

Open House & Old Car Show Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, WI

The following information was received from WDVA King WI



WHERE: Wisconsin Veterans Home
N2665 Cty Rd QQ
King WI

WHEN: Sunday, May 16, 2004

TIME: 10:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

No entry fee—No admission charge



SHOW ONLY—NO COMPETITION

**Food & restrooms available
on the grounds.**

A full day of activities includes the Old Car Show from 10 a.m.-1 p.m., tours, excursions on the Chain O' Lakes, band concerts, food and refreshments at the Veterans Home.

Donations at registration are appreciated.

For information contact:
Rich Calcut, (715) 258-5586.

Wisconsin Veterans Museum—Madison WI

The following information was found on the internet at: www.wisgov.state.wi.us/pressreleases

The award-winning Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison tells the story of men and women from the Badger State who served in America's conflicts from the Civil War to the Persian Gulf War.

The museum's galleries house dramatic portrayals that make historical events come alive. Take an online tour of the galleries to view a sample of the museum's stunning exhibits, artifacts and dioramas.

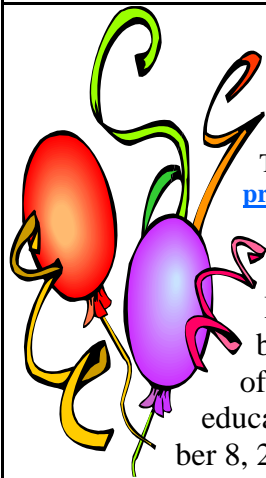
The museum's research center staff provide information and access to the collections, archives and library.

Located at 30 West Mifflin Street, the Wisconsin Veterans Museum is across the street from the

Wisconsin State Capitol and near the University of Wisconsin campus. Admission is free.

The museum is open: Monday - Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (year-round); Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. (April - September)

In addition to its facilities in Madison, the Wisconsin Veterans Museum also operates the Wisconsin National Guard Museum near Camp Douglas and a museum at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King. All three museums are operated by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs and supported by the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Foundation.



Wisconsin Veterans Museum Celebrated 10 Years as a State of the Art Museum—Nov 2003

The following information was found on the internet at: www.wisgov.state.wi.us/pressreleases

The Wisconsin Veterans Museum (WVM) celebrated 10 years as a state-of-the-art museum and educational center on November 8, 2003.

WVM was established in 1901 when the Wisconsin Legislature created a museum in the State Capitol honoring veterans of the Civil War "and any subsequent war." The museum was named the G.A.R. Memorial Hall Museum in recognition of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.), the most prominent organization of Civil War veterans. The G.A.R. Memorial Hall also served as the state G.A.R. headquarters and housed the Civil War battle flags of Wisconsin regiments.

In 1945, the newly created Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) as-

sumed administrative control of the museum, located on the fourth floor of the Capitol. In the 1980s, the Legislature needed more space for its operations while the museum was outgrowing its cramped facility in the Capitol. In 1989, WVM left the Capitol while a state-of-the-art facility was being constructed across the street at 30 W. Mifflin Street. At its dedication in 1993, more than 8,000 visitors viewed the 10,000 square feet of dramatic exhibits, dioramas and artifacts.

The Wisconsin Veterans Museum is a free public educational activity of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. The museum is open Monday through Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The museum's research center is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and by appointment. For more information contact Laura Kocum, at (608) 264-7663, or go to <http://museum.dva.state.wi.us>.

WISCONSIN VETERANS MUSEUM—CALENDAR OF EVENTS



ALL EVENTS ARE HELD AT:
(Unless otherwise specified)

THE WISCONSIN
VETERANS MUSEUM
30 W. MIFFLIN ST
MADISON WI 53703
(Across from the Capitol)

SERVICES:

Gallery & Gift Shop Hours:

Monday—Saturday (year-round)

9 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

Sunday (April—September)

Noon—4:00 p.m.

ADMISSION: Free for museum and programs unless otherwise specified.

GUIDED TOURS: Available for Groups of 10 or more.

Advance reservations required.

Research Center

Tuesday & Thursday (Year-round)

10 a.m.—3 p.m.

Call to schedule an appointment

FOR INFORMATION CALL:

608-267-1799

WEB PAGE

<http://museum.dva.state.wi.us>

UPCOMING EVENTS—2004

Watch For “Remembering the Holocaust”

March 1—June 30, 2004

Displaced : Europe 1945-1946,
Photographs by Maxine Rude

“Displaced: Europe 1945-1946” is a photographic exhibit by Wisconsin native Maxine Rude. Rude documents the plight of displaced families in Europe following the end of World War II and the Holocaust. Exploring schools, homes and street parades, Rude captures the joys and hardships of readjusting to a new world following the war.

“Displaced: Europe 1945-1946” is provided by the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Minnesota.

Information regarding the above exhibit can be found on the Museum’s Web Page at <http://museum.dva.state.wi.us>

Ongoing Exhibits

A Tribute to Freedom

The Wisconsin Veterans Museum is dedicated to the citizen-soldiers of our state. Employing exhibits, displays, and presentations, the museum's main galleries tell the story of Wisconsin men and women who served in America's conflicts from the Civil War to the Persian Gulf War.

Wisconsin National Guard Gallery

The Wisconsin National Guard Gallery features an exhibit that highlights the history of the Wisconsin National Guard. The exhibit highlights the chronology of the State Militia and its dual mission. Moreover, this exhibit illuminates the tenacity and valor of the 32nd Division during both the Great War and World War II. The exhibit highlights both the Wisconsin Army and Air National Guard as they served and continue to serve the State of Wisconsin, and when called upon, the Nation.

NEWS UPDATE FOR THE LOCAL AREA



Milwaukee—Armed Forces Week “Saluting America’s Guardians”

The following information is a press release from Milwaukee Armed Services Committee

“Saluting America’s Guardians” has been selected as the theme for the 2004 Milwaukee Armed Forces Week, a perennial community event honoring the men and women who are serving in our Armed Forces. This year’s event is scheduled for May 9—16 and planning is already underway.

More so than in other years, residents of Southeastern Wisconsin have been brought “up close and personal” with the sacrifice being made by members of our community. Everyone knows of a friend, neighbor, relative, or co-worker who has been called to active duty during this time of need.

The 128th Refueling Wing of the Army / Air National Guard, headquartered at Mitchell International, has seen many of its members deployed overseas at one time or another over the past two years.

The 440th Airlift Wing of the Air Force Reserves, also headquartered in Milwaukee, has had more than 300 reservists called to active duty in the past month. These men and women operate and maintain the 440th’s fleet of 12 C-130 Hercules transport aircraft and have been deployed to Southwest Asia.

Milwaukee Armed Forces Week is one of the nation’s largest and most successful local salutes and includes more than a dozen separate public events to honor those who guard our nation’s freedom. The event is supported by hundreds of volunteers, service groups and corporations. To learn how you might get involved, call 414-482-6100 today or log-on to www.armedforces.org. Event Hotline: 414-482-6100

Sunday, May 9

Mother’s Day Military Band Concert—84th Division
2:00 p.m. - Pabst Theater (www.pabsttheater.com)
114 East Wells St.
Downtown Milwaukee
corner of Wells and Water.
Contact Goldie Schuh at:
414-535-5753, SchuhGo@usarc-emh2.army.mil

Monday, May 10

ESGR Breakfast with the Boss and Bong Awards
7:00 a.m. - Wisconsin Club
Contact Colonel Jim Waters at:
414-944-8539, james.waters@wimilw.af.mil or
MG Joseph Scheinkoenig, - jaschein@execpc.com

Tuesday, May 11

Rotary Club Luncheon
11:30 a.m. - War Memorial, Memorial Hall
750 N. Lincoln Memorial Dr.
Contact Captain Thomas Plantenberg at:
jplanten@fmlh.edu

Wednesday, May 12

Kiwanis Club Luncheon
11:30 a.m. - War Memorial, Memorial Hall
750 N. Lincoln Memorial Dr.
Contact Jim Pittelkow at:
262-717-7200 ext. 213 jpittelkow@ebertinsurance.com

Thursday, May 13

Eagles Club Luncheon and Lance Sijan Award
11:00 a.m. - Porterhouse Restaurant
Contact Roy Kaczmarek at:
414-529-2183

Thursday, May 13

Civic Dinner Dance
6:00 p.m. - 440th Airlift Wing
Contact Dennis Mehring at:
414-482-5481, dmehring@generalmitchell.af.mil

Friday, May 14

Navy League Brunch
10:00 a.m. - Midwest Express Center
Contact Captain Bill Fantry (RET) at:
fantrywt@execpc.com

Friday, May 14

Navy Recruit Graduation Ceremony
10:45 a.m.—US Cellular Arena
400 W. Kilbourn Ave.
Contact Captain Bill Fantry (RET) at:
fantrywt@execpc.com or
Captain Dale Kaser at:
414-288-7076 dale.kaser@marquette.edu

Saturday May 15

Harley Davidson Ride for Armed Forces
9:00 a.m. - Harley—Davidson Plant
11700 W. Capitol Dr.
Contact Major Dave Owen at:
414-481-3860

Saturday May 15

Armed Forces Day at Miller Park
5:30 p.m. - Activities begin
6:05 p.m. - Game Time
Contact LTJG Dean Jordan at:
414-747-7191 DJordan@grumilwaukee.uscg.mil